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Statement of purpose

Taking stock of the universe of positions and goals that constitutes leftist politics today, we are left with the disquieting suspicion that a deep commonality underlies the apparent variety: What exists today is built upon the desiccated remains of what was once possible.

In order to make sense of the present, we find it necessary to disentangle the vast accumulation of positions on the Left and to evaluate their saliency for the possible reconstitution of emancipatory politics in the present. Doing this implies a reconsideration of what is meant by the Left.

Our task begins from what we see as the general disenchantment with the present state of progressive politics. We feel that this disenchantment cannot be cast off by sheer will, by simply "carrying on the fight," but must be addressed and itself made an object of critique. Thus we begin with what immediately confronts us.

The *Platypus Review* is motivated by its sense that the Left is disoriented. We seek to be a forum among a variety of tendencies and approaches on the Left—not out of a concern with inclusion for its own sake, but rather to provoke disagreement and to open shared goals as sites of contestation. In this way, the recriminations and accusations arising from political disputes of the past may be harnessed to the project of clarifying the object of leftist critique.

The *Platypus Review* hopes to create and sustain a space for interrogating and clarifying positions and orientations currently represented on the Left, a space in which questions may be raised and discussions pursued that would not otherwise take place. As long as submissions exhibit a genuine commitment to this project, all kinds of content will be considered for publication.

Submission guidelines
Articles will typically range in length from 750–4,500 words, but longer pieces will be considered. Please send article submissions and inquiries about this project to: *review_editor@platypus1917.org*. All submissions should conform to the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

The *Platypus Review* is funded by:
The University of Chicago Student Government
Dalhousie Student Union
Loyola University of Chicago
School of the Art Institute of Chicago Student Government
The New School
New York University
The University of Illinois at Chicago
The Platypus Affiliated Society

"The statements, opinions, and ideas conveyed in this program do not necessarily express the position of the University of Illinois at Chicago."

The Platypus Review

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How the counter-culture shaped the culture of unfreedom

Neil Davenport

"THE WORD 'CONSERVATIVE' IS USED by the BBC as a portmanteau word of abuse for anyone whose views differ from the insufferable, smug, sanctimonious, naïve, guilt-ridden, wet, pink orthodoxy of that sunset home of the third-rate minds of that third-rate decade, the nineteen-sixties."[1] Writing for the *Independent* back in 1990, former Conservative cabinet minister, Norman Tebbitt, demonstrated how the 1960s counter-culture still enraged traditionalists. Hard to believe today, but for conservatives the impact of the 1960s was as problematic as trade unions and flying pickets. Fifty years on from the counter-culture moment, and 27 years on from Tebbitt's highly memorable attack, it's hard to imagine any Conservative minister today launching such a bitter tirade. Conservative ministers now are likelier to be berated for *not* endorsing key counter-cultural values. Tebbitt's attack on the BBC itself was also noteworthy, an awareness that British institutions were seemingly succumbing to a new orthodoxy. Despite remarkable electoral success throughout that period, it sheds an insight on how conservatives were on the defensive. They could not halt what May 1968 had unleashed.

The counter-culture both in America and the UK encompassed many causes and social issues. One was a nonviolent movement in the United States seeking to end racial segregation and ongoing racial discrimination in jobs, housing and access to public spaces. The same applied to addressing the extension of rights for women, lesbians, and gays. An increasing number of younger people rejected the constraints of 1950s orthodoxy and aimed to create a more inclusive and tolerant social landscape. After the publication of Rachel Carson's *The Silent Spring*, Green politics also flourished during this period and, with it, a further questioning of western notions of economic progress and development. Finally, the counter-culture was associated with the sexual revolution, the promotion of recreational sex outside of marriage and for sexual experimentation. From challenging respectable racism to questioning conservatives were on the defensive. They could not halt what May 1968 had unleashed.

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Would slavery have ended sooner if the British had defeated the Colonists' bid for independence?

Keith Brooks

This article previously appeared in Op-Ed News, Portside, *and* Black Agenda Report . *This essay is from a chapter, "the Hidden History of the American Revolution", in* MythAmerica, *a book Keith is writing.*

"I WOULD NEVER HAVE DRAWN MY SWORD in the cause of America, if I could have conceived that thereby I was founding a land of slavery." – Marquis de Lafayette, French military leader who was instrumental in enlisting French support for the colonists in the American War of Independence.

Historians have long grappled with the contradiction of a revolution under the banner of "all men are created equal" being largely led by slave owners. Once free of England, the US grew over the next 89 years to be the largest slave-owning republic in history.

But the July 4th, 1776 Declaration of Independence (DI) was in-itself a revolutionary document. Never before in history had people asserted the right of revolution—not just to overthrow a specific government that no longer met the needs of the people, but as a general principle for the relationship between the rulers and the ruled: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. —That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it, and to institute new Government…"

And yes, "all men are created equal" excluded women, black people, and the indigenous populations of the continent, and was written by slave-owner Thomas Jefferson with all his personal hypocrisies. But the words themselves have been used many times since to challenge racism and other forms of domination and inequality. Both the 1789 French Revolution and the 1804 Haitian revolution—the only successful slave revolt in human history—drew inspiration from this clarion call. In 1829 black abolitionist David Walker threw the words of the DI back in the face of the slave republic: "See your declarations Americans!!! Do you understand your own language?" The 1848 Seneca Falls women's rights convention issued a Declaration of Sentiments proclaiming that "We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men and women are created equal." Vietnam used these very words in declaring independence from France in 1946. And as ML King stated in his 1963 "I have a Dream…" speech, it was "A promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

"See your declarations Americans!!! Do you understand your own language?"

Americans are taught to see the birth of our country as a gift to the world, even when its original defects are acknowledged. The DI along with the Constitution are pillars of American exceptionalism—the belief that the US is superior and unique from all others, holding the promise of an "Asylum for the persecuted lovers of civil and religious liberty" in the words of Thomas Paine in *Common Sense*. Historian Gary Nash has made a case that upon winning independence, the conditions for at least the gradual abolition of slavery throughout the 13 colonies were present but lacked political leadership. "One of the lessons of history is that in cases where a fundamental change has been accomplished against heavy odds, inspired leadership has been critically important," and "Washington, Jefferson, and Madison were strategically positioned to take the lead on the slavery issue. All three professed a hatred of slavery and a fervent desire to see it ended in their own time."[1]

For all their lofty rhetoric, none of them lifted a finger to bring that about. Perhaps though a different question might be asked: what if the British had won, had defeated the colonists' bid to break from the mother country? Is it possible that the cause of freedom and the ideals of the DI would have been paradoxically better served by that outcome?

England's Victory Over France Leads to the American War for Independence

It was, ironically, England's victory over France for control of the North American continent in the seven years' war (1756-1763) that laid the basis for their North American colonies to revolt just 13 years later. As the war with France ended, the British 1763 Proclamation prohibited white settlement west of the Appalachian Mountains in an attempt at detente with Native Americans—bringing England into conflict with colonists wanting to expand westward. More serious still were the series of taxes England imposed on the colonies to pay off its large war debt: the 1765 Stamp Act, the 1767 – 1770 Townshend Acts, and the 1773 Tea Acts, among others. As colonial leaders mounted increasingly militant resistance to these measures, so too did British repression ramp up.

And while "No taxation without representation" and opposition to British tyranny are the two most commonly cited causes propelling the colonists' drive for independence, recent scholarship (*Slave Nation* by Ruth and Alfred Blumrosen, Gerald Horne's *The Counter-Revolution of 1776*, and Alan Gilbert's *Black Patriots and Loyalists* in particular) has revealed a heretofore unacknowledged third major motivating force -- the preservation and protection of slavery itself. In 1772, the highest British court ruled in the Somerset decision that slave owners had no legal claims to ownership of other humans in England itself, declaring slavery to be "odious." Somerset eliminated any possibility of a *de jure* defense of slavery in England, further reinforced at the time by Parliament refusing a request by British slave owners to pass such a law. While Somerset did not apply to England's colonies, it was taken by southern colonists as a potential threat to their slave power. Their fear was further reinforced by the 1766 Declaratory Act, which made explicit England's final say over any laws made in the colonies, and the "Repugnancy" clause in each colony's charter. Somerset added fuel to the growing fires uniting the colonies against England in a fight for independence.

"**Seeing the Revolutionary War through the eyes of enslaved blacks turns its meaning upside down."** – Simon Schama, *Rough Crossings*

Among the list of grievances in the DI is the rarely scrutinized "He [referring to the king] has excited domestic insurrections amongst us." This grievance was motivated by Virginia Royal Governor Lord Dunmore's November 1775 proclamation stating that any person held as a slave by a colonist in rebellion against England would become free by joining the British forces in subduing the revolt. While 5000 mainly free black people from northern colonies joined with the colonists' fight for independence, few of our school books teach that tens of thousands more enslaved black people joined with the British, with an even greater number taking advantage of the war to escape the colonies altogether by running to Canada or Florida. They saw they had a better shot at "Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" with the British—than with their colonial slave masters.

To further put these numbers in perspective, the total population of the 13 colonies at the time was 2.5 million, of whom 500,000 were slaves and indentured servants. While there is some debate about the exact numbers, Peter Kolchin in *American Slavery* points to the "Sharp decline between 1770 and 1790 in the proportion of the population made up of blacks (almost all of whom were slaves) from 60.5% to 43.8% in South Carolina and from 45.2% to 36.1% in Georgia" (73). Other commonly cited figures from historians estimate 25,000 slaves escaped from South Carolina, 30,000 from Virginia, and 5,000 from Georgia. Gilbert in *Black Patriots and Loyalists* says, "estimates range between twenty thousand and one hundred thousand… if one adds in the thousands of not yet organized blacks who trailed… the major British forces… the number takes on dimensions accurately called 'gigantic.'[2]

Among them were 30 of Thomas Jefferson's slaves, 20 of George Washington's, and good ole "Give me liberty or give me death" Patrick Henry also lost his slave Ralph Henry to the Brits. It was the first mass emancipation in American history. Evidently "domestic insurrection" was legitimate when led by slave owners against England but not when enslaved people rose up for their freedom–against the rebelling slave owners!

Before there was Harriet Tubman there was Colonel Tye

Crispus Attucks is often hailed as the first martyr of the American revolution, a free black man killed defying British authority in the 1770 Boston Massacre. But few have heard of Titus, who just 5 years later was among those thousands of slaves who escaped to the British lines. He became known as Colonel Tye for his military prowess in leading black and white guerrilla fighters in numerous raids throughout Monmouth County, New Jersey, taking reprisals against slave owners, freeing their slaves, destroying their weaponry and creating an atmosphere of fear among the rebel colonists—and hope among their slaves. Other black regiments under the British fought with ribbons emblazoned across their chests saying "Liberty to Slaves."

One might compare Col. Tye to Attucks, but if Attucks is a hero, what does that make Tye, who freed hundreds of slaves? Perhaps a more apt comparison is with Harriet Tubman, who escaped slavery in 1849 and returned to the South numerous times to also free hundreds of her brothers and sisters held in bondage.

So What If the British Had Won?

At no point though did the British declare the end of slavery to be a war goal; it was always just a military tactic. But if the Brits had won, as they came close to doing, it might have set off a series of events that went well beyond their control. Would England have been able to restore slavery in the 13 colonies in the face of certain anti-slavery resistance by the tens of thousands of now free ex-slaves, joined by growing anti-slavery forces in the northern colonies? As Gilbert puts it, "Class and race forged ties of solidarity in opposition to both the slave holders and the colonial elites."[3] Another sure ally would have been the abolitionist movement in England, which had been further emboldened by the 1772 Somerset decision. And if England had to abolish slavery in the 13 colonies, would that not have led to a wave of emancipations throughout the Caribbean and Latin America?

And just what was the cost of the victorious independence struggle to the black population? To the indigenous populations who were described in that same DI grievance as "The merciless Indian Savages"? Might it have been better for the cause of freedom if the colonists lost? And if the colonists had lost, wouldn't the ideals of the DI have carried just as much if not more weight?

"The price of freedom from England was bondage for African slaves in America. America would be a slave nation." – Eleanor Holmes Norton, introduction to *Slave Nation.*

We do know, however, the cost of the colonists' victory: once independence was won, while the northern states gradually abolished slavery, slavery BOOMED in the south. The first federal census in 1790 counted 700,000 slaves. By 1810, 2 years after the end of the slave trade, there were 1.2 million slaves, a 70% increase. England ended slavery in all its colonies in 1833, when there were 2 million enslaved people in the U.S. Slavery in the

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The death agony of meritocracy

Jack Devine

FORTY-FIVE MILLION AMERICANS collectively owe upward of $1.4 trillion in student loan debt. Yet there is no need to worry. The magic of the free market has a solution for all of your problems. On July 10, 2018, "Paid Off" premiered on TruTV, a new game show that offers contestants a chance to escape a lifetime of debt peonage. "We're capitalists. That's just the way it is."

Less than 17 months after Nancy Pelosi's Margaret Thatcher impersonation, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has shaken the foundation of the United States' political class. Backed by small dollar donations and an army of canvassers, the self-described democratic socialist from the Bronx exposed the ghost in the New York Democratic Party machine. Her victory shattered the established consensus on what was possible in electoral politics. There is an alternative.

Ocasio-Cortez's electoral victory did not emerge out of thin air, but as an outgrowth of the social movements for a radically democratic political revolution in the United States. Flickers of an anti-capitalist working class revolt emerged in the aftermath the 2008 financial crash. Occupy Wall Street, inspired by the Arab Spring and the *Indignados* movement in Spain, symbolized broad contempt for the masters of finance capital. The Chicago Teachers' Strike in 2012 was an uprising against Rahm Emanuel's regime of austerity for the poor and tax breaks for the profiteers. Across the United States workers organized together under the banner of Fight for 15 in a collective struggle for a living wage. Black Lives Matter was a declaration of worth by those hounded for generations by an authoritarian police state. The indigenous water protectors at Standing Rock refused to surrender quietly against fossil fuel capital and centuries of white settler colonialism. Bernie Sanders' near upset in the 2016 Democratic Primary provided a new model for social democratic electoral campaigns while forcing an alternative vision for society into mainstream discourse. In the less than two years since that election concluded with a buffoonish reactionary huckster as the United States' chief executive, the dues-paying membership of the Democratic Socialists of America has skyrocketed from 6,000 to 48,000. Ocasio-Cortez is merely the zenith thus far of democratic socialist organizers ascending to elected office through a grassroots campaign strategy of mass-based volunteer canvassing, phone bank operations, social media outreach, and a widespread online fundraising network. Earlier this year four socialist women won their primaries in Pennsylvania for the state house assembly. Last November Lee Carter defeated the now-former GOP whip in an election for the Virginia House of Delegates. While electoral politics in and of itself is insufficient to supplant the entrenched power of the capitalist ruling class, these developments reflect the increasing popularity of collective action as the solution to our exponentially growing societal rot.

Despite pronouncements of an economic recovery, the crisis of neoliberal capitalism has only further intensified since the failure to make structural adjustments in the aftermath of the 2008 subprime mortgage crisis. As non-financial corporations and governments joined Wall Street and households in an orgy of fictitious capital accumulation, cumulative global debt soared to a record $233 trillion by the end of 2017, 318 percent higher than global GDP.[1] An unsustainable debt-to-production ratio that far surpasses the asset bubble that burst during the 2008 financial crash.[2] In order to maintain their historically high rate of profit in spite of decades of stagnant growth in the imperial core, capitalists have redoubled their commitment to asset inflation over productive investment. While the stock market and the exchange-value of private property ascend to unprecedented heights, the conditions of the laborers primarily responsible for the transformation of raw materials into useful goods and services have continually deteriorated in the imperial core. Real wages in the United States remain stagnant. The costs of healthcare, education, and housing have risen dramatically. Productivity and GDP growth drags at a paltry rate when compared to the supposed golden age of Keynesian social democracy. Life expectancy in the United States, the wealthiest country in the history of the world, has begun to decline. Rising rates of suicide and drug addiction are the consequence of a working class riddled with never-ending anxiety. Nearly half of all Americans would struggle to find $400 for an emergency expense. Twenty-seven percent skip medical treatments because they cannot afford them.[3]

In reality the illusory recovery has only served to temporarily entrench the international dictatorship of big finance capital and its tyranny of exchange-value. Billionaires now have the capacity to end extreme poverty with a mere fraction of their wealth, but choose to hoard it in the nihilistic competition for the world's pre-eminent exploiter. Their regime of artificial scarcity is enforced by an expanding global police state built upon the toxic fusion of the United States' military-prison-industrial complex. American arms manufacturers' profits soar as their weapons of mass disruption circle the globe, while millions of impoverished Americans are encircled by jail cells for the crime of being poor. Workers and peasants in Central America fleeing the mass violence of counter-revolutionary death squads originally trained and funded by American imperialists are denounced by the United States President as savage animals. The refugee crisis is only becoming exacerbated as the devastating effects of climate change punish those least responsible for altering the atmospheric balance necessary for the maintenance of human civilization. Amidst this rising tide of barbarism there is no time to despair. The inherent contradictions within the current iteration of the capitalist mode of production are propelling a mass movement for socialist liberation. As the ruling class gleefully marches the rest of humanity towards the second great cataclysm of capitalism, the fundamental questions for historical materialists remain the same. How did we get here? What is to be done in order to transcend bourgeois madness?

In his 1982 State of the Union address to Congress, President Ronald Reagan promised an end to government policies that were "taking power away from the hands of the people in their States and local communities." Electorally, the conservative movement he represented found mass appeal among the unprecedentedly populous mass base of petty-bourgeois property owners in the sprawling suburbs of the United States. The primary economic beneficiaries of the private-public partnership that formed the expansive post-war imperial bureaucracy were whipped into a social Darwinian froth against the tepid social democratic policies that had enabled their rise into the middle class in the first place. Historically anomalous social mobility coupled with decades of relentless anticommunist propaganda produced a generation entranced by an abstract individualist vision of the world. The post-war cultural revolution of their formative years that partially upended reactionary patriarchal structures paradoxically provided the conservative movement with the language to craft a potent counter-revolutionary narrative. The newly hegemonic culture of the self "found political expression in the British premier Margaret Thatcher's: 'There is no society, only individuals.'" Simultaneously, the American bourgeoisie unleashed a vicious campaign against those who had recently liberated themselves from legalized apartheid through collective struggle. Black Americans were the first afflicted by the automation and outsourcing of Fordist commodity production. The deindustrialization of the imperial core that accompanied the collapse of the Keynesian golden age of capitalism facilitated the rise of a social class of "those who became permanently welfare dependent" who "were both resented and despised by those who thought themselves as earning a living by work."[4] The coalescence of these historical forces enabled reactionaries "to make privilege popular, to transform a tottering old regime into a dynamic, ideologically coherent movement of the masses. A new old regime, one could say, which brings the energy and dynamism of the street to the antique inequalities of a dilapidated estate."

Their ascendance to the highest levers of state power in the world's most powerful empire represented the crystallization of the neoliberal global hegemony. The free market theologians preached that the magic of unfettered capitalism was the only manner to ensure freedom and prosperity. Fear-mongering ideologues warned that the collectivization of an expanding social democratic state apparatus represented the "road to serfdom." Only by unleashing the restrained forces of the market could the descent into authoritarianism be avoided. The absurdity of their claim was obvious for anyone with knowledge of Milton Friedman's role advising Pinochet's murderous counter-revolutionary terror against Chilean democratic socialism. What reactionaries actually mean when they declare their commitment to liberty is the freedom of the few to dominate the many by any means necessary. Despite their endlessly repeated meaningless platitudes about the individual, the foundational aim of counter-revolutionaries was, and always has been since the French Revolution, the re-entrenchment of ruling class power over the social movements that threatened their hierarchical domination. Their theory in practice meant wealth redistribution to the propertied classes and violent retribution against those who challenged them.

Reagan did not waste any time in striking a decisive blow against organized labor. In 1981 his administration broke the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization's strike by firing 11,000 workers. Union membership rate in the United States declined from 20.1 percent in 1983 to 11.1 percent in 2015.[5] Increased disorganization accompanied a decline in militancy. Correspondingly, real wages have remained stagnant ever since. Workers' most significant weapon against capital, the capacity to collectively withhold their labor, had practically disappeared from American life until the most recent upsurge. There was an annual average of 303 strikes involving 1,000 or more workers during the era of post-war social democracy. After three decades of precipitous decline the number of mass strikes had stabilized at fourteen per year between 2010 and 2017.[6] The neoliberal counter-revolutionaries simultaneously unleashed a social Darwinian crusade against the growing underclass. Their demonization campaign targeting "welfare queens" served the dual purpose of cutting social services and therefore taxes on the rich, while implicitly signaling to white supremacists that conservative elites shared their electoral bases' contempt for black people. Impoverished Americans were denounced as morally inferior beings who had nobody to blame but themselves. The war on drugs and the subsequent rise of mass incarceration was an even more vicious extension of their social Darwinian logic. Not only were the poor responsible for their own misery, but many were dangerous savages whom the state needed to isolate in maximum security facilities for the safety of civil society. In "Are Prisons Obsolete?," Angela Davis describes how their lives were deemed unvaluable in a neoliberal marketplace "driven by an unprecedented pursuit of profit, no matter the human cost." The American bourgeoisie's "massive prison-building project that began in the 1980s created the means of concentrating and managing what the capitalist system had implicitly declared to be human surplus." By 2016 this supposedly expendable population had expanded to 6,613,500 individuals.[7]

Violent retribution against perceived threats to the American ruling class extended well beyond the nation's borders. While securing free access to cheap labor markets outside the industrial core was always an element of capitalist imperialism, it was the fundamental basis for commodity production in the neoliberal project. In the decades following the Second World War the commercialization of agriculture produced one of the most revolutionary changes in social relations in human history. Hundreds of millions

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of farmers across the Global South were forced off their land into exponentially expanding metropolises. The global peasantry was rapidly proletarianized. While this presented capitalists with lucrative opportunities for an increased rate of exploitation, it also led to undesired political consequences. Throughout the 1980s social revolutionaries in Central America challenged the local rule of the American-backed landed aristocracy. United States imperialism was already a long-established tradition in the region. In the 1980s the upper echelons of the Pentagon and intelligence services retooled the anticommunist crusade for a new struggle. Paramilitaries, death squads, and army units trained by the American imperial bureaucracy unleashed a violent terror across El Salvador during a 12-year civil war which killed more than 75,000 people.[8] The proliferation of arms and organized violent gangs destabilized the region. As a result the flow of undocumented immigrants from Central America to the United States surged in the 1990s.[9] Refugees continue to flee the indiscriminate violence of the drug cartels, whose leadership emerged from the demobilized death squads trained and funded by the United States.

The premeditated massacres of the labor and black freedom movements in the United States as well as the decapitation of revolutions for socialist liberation in the Global South were essential preconditions for consolidating the power of global financial capital. In 1982 the Reagan administration legalized stock buybacks. A mechanism that enables publicly-traded corporations to reinvest their profits back into their own stock to artificially inflate their value, as opposed to investment in productivity-increasing expenditures such as labor and technological development. In the aftermath of the 2017 Republican tax cuts, as real wages for the vast majority of Americans have remained stagnant, public companies announced a record of more than $600 billion in buybacks in the first half of this year alone.[10] The legalization of stock buybacks was merely the tip of the spear of a bipartisan project to deregulate financial instruments through which property owners could parasitically extract more surplus value in passive income schemes. The apostles of Milton Friedman preached that eliminating the restrictions placed on corporations would spur an innovative, competitive marketplace. That notion proved to be utter fiction. Corporate consolidation is now a prominent feature of the global economy.[11] Decades of capital concentration have crushed the entrepreneurial spirit supposedly unleashed by unfettered capitalism. The number of startups and their impact on overall employment has declined since the early 1980s.[12] While the conservative movement achieved their primary objective of redistributing wealth and power upwards towards to the bourgeoisie, the narrative that justified their goals has been exposed as a sham. The wolf in sheep's clothing has been laid bare.

The material conditions of young adults in the United States have dramatically deteriorated since 1977. In contrast to previous generations, about half of 30- and 40-year-olds are earning less than their parents earned at the same age. Social mobility in the United States has fallen by more than 70 percent in the past half-century.[13] Homeownership rates have declined from 48 percent to 39 percent. 43 percent of Americans are now renters, the largest share in at least 50 years. Nearly half of those households pay more than 30 percent of their income in rent, while a quarter pay more than half their income. Both figures have more than doubled since 1960.[14] While median wages have remained the same, the cost of a college education has increased by 150 percent. Correspondingly, young adults' median debt has risen by more than 221 percent.[15] While more Millennials acquired a college degree than any generation before, instead of reaping the promised rewards they have been punished with debt peonage. The neoliberal myth that skills training enhances job opportunities proved to be yet another free-market fantasy. There is only an American Dream for those lucky enough to be born into the land of luxury, while the vast majority of the population suffocates under the nightmarish weight of ceaseless exploitation and overwhelming anxiety. As of August 2017, 78 percent of full-time workers in the United States reported that they live paycheck to paycheck.[16] The Millennials' rejection of the status quo and their search for a superior alternative does not arise out of bleeding heart idealism, but rather from the failure of capitalism to provide them with a stable future.

The contradictions between the ideological narrative propagated by neoliberalism and the material reality it produces cannot hold. Structural inequality ripples through every facet of the socioeconomic order; a two-tiered system of injustice that exposes the lie at the heart of liberal capitalism. Plutocrats continuously fail without facing serious consequences, while misfortunate dooms the working class to a life of endless despair. When reckless financial executives unleashed the subprime mortgage crisis they continued to reap in multi-million dollar bonuses,[17] while bankrupted working class homeowners were punished with millions of foreclosures.[18] Social Darwinian capitalism rhetorically ridicules state intervention into the political economy, but in actuality relies upon the violent suppression of the most vulnerable elements of society in order to maintain its oppressive hierarchies.[19] Neoliberal ideology is based upon a negative perception of freedom in which corporate overlords are free to exploit without democratic interference, while workers are forced into a labor market where the punishments for lacking the adequate skills to serve the masters of capital are poverty, imprisonment, and death. Despite its self-proclaimed reputation as the leader of the free world, the United States incarcerates far more citizens into its widespread system of gulags than any other government, including the far more populous authoritarian state-capitalist People's Republic of China.[20] Militarized American state officials extra-judicially execute more of their own people than any developed nation on earth.[21] The rhetorical commitment to individual freedom is a facade to conceal neoliberalism's fundamentally anti-democratic faith in the inherent superiority of capitalists.

It takes an embarrassing level of cognitive dissonance to still believe in the moral supremacy of the plutocrats. Their already absurdly self-serving rationale has become even more laughable in the age of Trump. His presidency is the inevitable conclusion of a society poisoned by a social Darwinian mentality, while his blatant failings fully expose the fallacy of its ideological premise. Any society in which such an ignorant oaf can accumulate so much wealth and power could not possibly have any hierarchy formulated upon aptitude and diligence. Leon Trotsky's description of the Russian autocracy in 1917 feels equally apt in 2018. "The privileged classes are now changed from organizers of national life into a parasitic growth; having lost their guiding function, they lose the consciousness of their mission and all confidence in their powers."[22] Trump and his ghoulish enablers demonstrably prove that the meritocracy is a pernicious lie. The scum rises to the top. For far too long this most odious conspiracy has been hidden in plain sight. The impunity of the bourgeoisie is not a bug that can be squashed with minor reforms, but only through the collective struggle of the international working class. Capital has yet again dug its own grave, but is the proletariat prepared to bury the bourgeoisie permanently in the annals of history?

For decades, the Left in the United States has been divided into a non-profit industrial complex and bureaucratized unions committed to defending the Democratic Party in order to survive off its crumbs, alongside sectarian leftist groups preaching their intellectual superiority while doing very little to materially improve people's lives. This is not entirely the fault of American socialists, as the unprecedented rise in home ownership in the post-war era created the ideal base for political reaction. Yet when this facade collapsed in 2008 the radical left was thoroughly unprepared. It was overly fixated on perpetually having the right answers in 1923 rather than a historical materialist analysis geared towards building a mass movement for socialism now. What the successful electoral campaign of Ocasio-Cortez and others backed by the Democratic Socialists of America most significantly demonstrate is the emergence of a socialist left capable of projecting power in the United States. The social forces that led to Ocasio-Cortez's primary victory highlight the potential of a new multi-racial working-class coalition. Her district, in the heart of the most diverse area in the world, is a melting pot of populations battered down by the exploitation of neoliberal capitalism: downwardly mobile professional-class Millennials, black Americans facing an onslaught of gentrification and mass incarceration, as well as immigrants fleeing the violence imposed by US imperialism. The hegemonic ideological narrative has not led to the expected destination and they are ready to write a new story.

Ocasio-Cortez's campaign's injection of socialism into mainstream discourse proves why democratic elections are an absolutely essential front of class struggle. Yet politicians can never bring about socialist liberation. What is necessary to truly challenge capital is to construct radically democratic counter-hegemonic institutions that are not only capable of momentarily paralyzing capital in order to seize power, but to utterly crush the ruling class when they inevitably strike back. We are clearly nowhere close to being prepared to do so. Yet there are signs of hope of an emerging class struggle. Young people are driving an increase in unionization as the professional classes become proletarianized. Media workers and academics are meeting their growing precarity with increased organization. Laborers in social reproduction are becoming militant in the face of a decade of austerity. A wave of mass teachers' strikes in West Virginia, Jersey City, Oklahoma, Kentucky, Arizona, Colorado, and North Carolina as well as strikes by nurses in California and Vermont have proven that labor is still a force to be reckoned with. In July, Amazon warehouse workers throughout Europe went on strike against the international conglomerates' increasingly high rate of exploitation. The #MeToo movement revealed how women all across the world are ready to organize and fight back against their predatory bosses. Millions of Spaniards withheld their socially-reproductive labor on International Women's Day while Indian women hit the streets to reject their status as second-class citizens. Worker cooperatives are proliferating, from Rojava in Northern Syria to Jackson, Mississippi. Activists in Pittsburgh and Sacramento shut down their cities to demand justice for yet another murder of an unarmed young black man by the police. Occupy Ice is directly confronting the deportation apparatus. Anti-fascists are battling white supremacists in the streets. Prisoners across the United States will begin a series of strikes on August 21st. Socialist organizers must meet people where they are struggling against the ruling class and facilitate the energies of rising masses towards social revolution. Will the flexible and localized structure of the Democratic Socialists of America provide a conduit for building lasting institutions of radically democratic working-class power? It is impossible to know anything other than that we have so much work to do in such little time. The spectre of climate change presents humanity with a binary choice: socialism or barbarism. We have a world to win. **|P**

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"Would slavery have ended", cont. from page 3

U.S. continued for another 33 years, during which time the slave population doubled to 4 million human beings. The U.S abolished slavery in 1865; only Cuba and Brazil ended slavery at a later date. And the colonists' victory also further opened the gates to the attempted genocide of the indigenous peoples over the next 125 years.

The foregoing is not meant to romanticize and project England as some kind of abolitionist savior had they kept control of the colonies. Lord Dunmore himself was a slave owner. England was the center of the international slave trade. Despite losing the 13 colonies, England maintained its position as the most powerful and rapacious empire in the world till the mid-20th century. As England did away with chattel slavery, it replaced it with the capitalist wage slavery of the industrial revolution. It used food as a weapon to starve the Irish, conquered and colonized large swaths of Asia, Africa, and the Pacific.

"The U.S abolished slavery in 1865; only Cuba and Brazil ended slavery at a later date."

We often see the outcomes of history as predetermined, as inevitabilities, and think there were no other outcomes possible. We look back 240 years later and for most it seems unquestionable that the American revolution was good for the world, a step, perhaps somewhat tortured, towards progress and freedom. But for historian Gerald Horne, "Simply because Euro-American colonists prevailed in their establishing of the US, it should not be assumed that this result was inevitable. History points to other possibilities... I do not view the creation of the republic as a great leap forward for humanity."[4]

The American revolution was not just a war for independence from England. It was also a battle for freedom against the very leaders of that rebellion by hundreds of thousands of enslaved black people, a class struggle of poor white tenant farmers in many cases also against that same white colonial elite, and a fight for survival of the indigenous populations. But the colonists' unlikely victory was to lead to the creation of the largest slave nation in history, the near genocide of the indigenous populations, and a continent-wide expansion gained by invading and taking over half of Mexico. The U.S. went on to become an empire unparalleled in history, its wealth origins rooted largely in slave labor. The struggles for equality and justice for all that the DI promised continues of course, a task that remains undone, ML King's promissory note unfulfilled to this day.

The late Chinese Premier Chou en Lai was once asked his assessment as to whether the French revolution was a step forward in history. His response was, "It's too soon to tell". Was the founding of the United States a step forward in history? Or is it still too soon to tell? **|P**

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3 Gilbert, 10.
4 Gerald Horne, *Counter-Revolution of 1776*, (New York: NYU, 2014), ix.

"Event report", cont. from page 2

the obvious question, "Who?" To which he responded firmly, "Everyone. Everyone will hate you. The boss will hate you. The businesses will hate you. And even other unions who work for those businesses will hate you."

The rest of the conference blurred behind that single plain-spoken utterance. That's not to say that these speakers didn't give moving speeches. They did. I heard from teachers who were rising up across the country. I heard from Puerto Rican teachers who struggled to maintain their public school system against disaster capitalism attempting to privatize it after the hurricane. I heard national and international solidarity from all sides. Everyone committed to fighting Janus, getting union members involved, and reviving the strike. The Teamsters for a Democratic Union talked a big game on how they'd get a good contract or go on strike. But all of this rang hollow. I kept hearing the echo, "Everyone will hate you."

I finished my pack of cigarettes outside the entry to the Hyatt on the last day. Labor activists of all varieties were packing up, chatting, and waiting in huddled, smoky mobs as the vans pulled up to take them to the airport. I chatted absent-mindedly with a few friends from around the country until they had to bid me farewell and board their van. I thought about the young Teamster again and again: "Everyone will hate you." This seemed self-evident to me. Yet, how could I possibly reconcile it with the "up with people" attitude plastered everywhere at Labor Notes? How could I possibly reconcile the brutal "we've got to do this" attitude with the laxity and certitude that everything would continue all right? The simple fact is that I couldn't and wouldn't.

I grimaced bitterly, tossed my cigarette in the parking lot, and breathlessly whispered to myself, "The left is dead..." as I walked to catch the Blue Line train home. **|P**

"The death agony", cont. footnotes

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"Culture of unfreedom", cont. from page 1

now likelier to be argued by radical activists. Although such developments seem a betrayal of counter-culture values, of permissiveness and of freedom, they are in fact a continuum of other counter-culture themes—the vulnerable individual.

The idea of the 'anti-hero', the 'beautiful loser' has played a large part in popular culture. From J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*, Marlon Brando in the *The Wild One* to Kurt Cobain, the 'damaged' individual has greater cache than the self-confident go-getter. It became a mode of behavior in direct opposition to having direction and purpose. In an age which looks to anti-heroes rather than heroes, vulnerability rather than ambition has become the key feature in the cultural personality of our times.[6] But there's more going on here than adolescent affectation. It has re-defined how state agencies relate to other individuals and how we relate to each other. Vast swathes of social policy are now couched in the language of *vulnerability*. The protection of 'vulnerable individuals' has become the justification for restraints on individual freedoms. One person's individual freedom of expression is another person's sense of hurt or damage. Freedom is no longer the facilitator of experimentation and possibilities, but of damage to others or damage to the planet. The cultivation of vulnerability that dominated the counter-culture sensibility led to the same pessimistic conclusions of personal freedom as the traditionalists they overturned.

Fifty years on since the counter-culture, its core norms and values have long become the mainstream. This was less to do with the dynamism of radical activists and more with the collapse in confidence of traditional conservatives. Haunted by the inter-war depression and engulfed by a crisis of legitimacy, traditionalists couldn't put up a fight to preserve their values, beliefs and way of life. The liberalizing of Western societies was undoubtedly a valuable development, but this has proved brief and illusory. British society in particular has become less free, over-regulated, and increasingly a stagnant society. A dynamic civic life has been steadily replaced by a hemmed in private existence for most people. Ultimately the loss of a key Western value, that of the free and purposeful individual shaping the world, has been a retrograde misstep for both the individual and Western society. You don't have to be Norman Tebbitt to look back with anguish at the 1960s counter-culture. **|P**

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"May '68 in France", cont. from page 2

occurred while Johnson was president and the war in Vietnam was expanding, and that Woodstock occurred while Nixon was president and the Silent Majority was feeling its oats. It required blindness then and blindness now to ignore how such contradictory events occurred simultaneously and to turn a blind eye to the fact that Woodstock and "peace, love, and understanding" did nothing to prevent slaughter in Southeast Asia.

It is capital's genius to perfectly accommodate seemingly radical attacks that emanate from a segment—the young—that will only temporarily maintain the defining nature of its status: youth. Woodstock Nation died ignobly at Altamont; the dreams of May '68 in France ended when the Maoist Pierre Overney was killed by a security guard outside a Renault factory, and not a worker uttered a word of protest. Both were representative of the illusion that youth can carry the day, that it can change society. May '68's lesson is perhaps a dual and difficult one: in the first instance, the caricatural battle within households between the young, who feel they have all the answers their elders fail to see, and the old, who view the young as arrogant upstarts, carries over into the political Left. And the other is that youth on its own cannot change society while the working class has lost its role as the bearer of the future. The problem the French Left could not solve then and which continues to confront progressives is: what and who will be the motor of change? All of the past groups assigned the task: the working-class, youth, communities of color, have failed to accomplish it. If there is no one motive force—as history, and not theoretical texts, has shown—the classical revolutionary outlook no longer holds. And maybe that is May '68's real lesson: the revolutionary dream has long been a mirage and must be jettisoned for good and all. The Trotskyism, Maoism, Guevarism, and communism that roiled the participants of May '68 in France and the student uprisings throughout the world are museum pieces. Electoral forms of radicalism have largely taken their place, with the young taking the lead. But for all the affection the young feel for more senior figures like Bernie Sanders and Jeremy Corbyn, it is in no way certain that the generational split within the Left of the 1960s has been overcome. Intergenerational discord was not born in the '60s and did not die with it. The question history poses us is: can it ever be overcome? **|P**

May '68 in France and the hidden war within the Left

Mitchell Abidor

IN MAY AND JUNE 1968, somewhere around ten million workers were on strike in France. They occupied their factories and marched in the streets, singing the "Internationale" and calling for an end to the ten years of Gaullist rule. Students, too, were on strike, occupying their schools and marching in the streets, singing the "Internationale" and calling for an end to the ten years of Gaullist rule. But popular memory is no less fallible than human memory, and so a poll published in early 2018 in the *Nouveau Magazine Littéraire* showed that 86% of those polled thought of the events of May '68 as a student movement. The media, which have been dominated by the baby-boomers, many of whom participated in '68 and have long focused largely on the student struggle, play a role in this partial amnesia. But this erasing of the workers' fights is a continuation of a battle that went on fifty years ago during the events between the young and their elders, one that undergirds the ideological differences that tore apart the Left.

For all the surface disputes in May over revolutionary versus reformist demands, between Trotskyism and Stalinism, or anarchism and communism, between the students and the unions—in particular, the French Communist Party (PCF) and their labor union, the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT)—something else was at play during the six weeks of the events. As I came to see while interviewing participants for *May Made Me: An Oral History of the 1968 Uprising in France* (PM Press, 2018), May '68 was a successful cultural revolt accompanied by a failed political revolt, a militant manifestation of the generation-gap that dominated discourse at the time and was making itself felt throughout the West. And it was this generation-gap within the Left that contributed in no small measure to its political failure.

Outside its borders, the image of France that preceded May '68 as a sexually liberated society—a society far different from puritanical America—bore little relation to the one actually experienced by the French. This was particularly true for the young, who ironically looked to the U.S. as a place where freedom reigned.

Éliane Paul-Divicenzo, a student in Nantes, told of how a woman's future was laid out for her while still an undergraduate: "I was at the École Normale of Nantes and we were all given numbers based on our rank in the entrance exam. According to the number we were assigned a pedagogical mother, a pedagogical grandmother, and a pedagogical husband. Every year there was a ball organized by the director and directress of the school so we could meet our future spouse, and normally this was our pedagogical husband. For the ball there was a mass of rules about how we should dress, the distance to be kept between us when we danced, what to say."

Myriam Chédotal, a high school student in Saint-Nazaire, still shudders when she discusses the hypocritical personal life she had to live: "I was constantly forced to lie, to get around the surrounding hypocrisy, which meant either pretending to conform, and sometimes by insolence or rebellion or lying. Because everyone knew that we were going out with boys, that boys and girls of my age were sleeping together. So, I quickly found myself confronted with lies and the need to lie."

Jean-Michel Rabaté, a student in Bordeaux in May, echoed this: "You shouldn't forget just how reactionary and repressive France was. The March 22 Movement—perhaps I'm wrong, but what set it off was when the students at Nanterre wanted to sleep with their girlfriends in the same room. These days this seems normal, but at the time it was strictly forbidden. So, there was this absurd sexual repression, but sexuality was only one element, though the most obvious one."

It was thanks to May that this hypocrisy, this repression in personal life was swept away. Suzanne Borde, who had been unpolitical before the uprising, was moved to action by the events and participated actively in her neighborhood's action committee. After it became clear that wide social change was not imminent, she lived on communes before finally resuming her education and becoming an astrophysicist. When I said to her that since May had failed to overturn society, it had achieved nothing concrete, she cut me short: "Sure it did. It completely changed my life."

There is no question that, as almost every student participant told me, as an outgrowth of May, women achieved the ability to speak out, to have abortions, to access birth control, and to run their lives in their own way. The women's movement took form. Students were able to shake the magisterial system of education and gain a voice in how their schools would be run. And even though the heavy hand of Gaullism still guided France in the immediate aftermath, it was now a shaky one and would be shed a year later when the people rejected de Gaulle's proposed restructuring of governance in a referendum. May, then, was a success. The artist Jean-Jacques Lebel, who organized the occupation of the Odéon Theater, insisted that May was necessary to get to the point of personal liberation that had already been achieved in the U.S., saying "we really needed it" because it is impossible to "compare the U.S. and old Europe...Capitalism doesn't function on Wall Street as it does here [in Paris], in London, or in Milan."

This notion, that May's success can be measured by the way it liberated the millions of individuals who participated in it (and even those who did not) is a perfectly acceptable way to view it. But if there is anything that the history of the last fifty years has shown us, it is that the sum total of the cultural freedom of millions of individuals does not result in the freeing of society. It does not put an end to racism, to exploitation, and even to forms of repression. The expansion of areas of opportunity, of liberation, as long as they do not touch the core of society's ills, strengthens the existing order instead of weakening it. In fact, this model of individual liberation is only absolutely accurate if we accept the truth of Margaret Thatcher's famous "There is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women." Ironically, in that case, there could be no question of the success of May '68.

Prisca Bachelet, who helped organize the occupation of the University of Nanterre that would ultimately lead to the events of May, phrased this perfectly, describing the aftermath of May: "[W]hile we assumed intellectual hegemony, we didn't notice that the bosses were reorganizing and modernizing, that there was new management ... We missed the central axes, which leaves us in the situation we're in."

Henri Simon, a veteran of Socialisme ou Barbarie, had a more negative perspective: "It was a great confusion. I think that a transformation of mores had been going on for some time because of transformations in the system, and that in the end, '68 was a mark of that, but it didn't cause the change. May '68 smashed forms of control and brought others, it modernized the system. And the restructuring of the capitalist system was happening."

In France as elsewhere in the West in the 1960s, it was the young who felt most strongly and fought most fiercely against the weights placed on them by the world they were entering. It was from the young around France that sprang the poetic slogans and posters which, along with the barricades, stand as the image of May '68. "Be Realistic. Demand the impossible." "Under the paving stones the beach." Even a young Communist like Dominique Barbe, a high school student in Nantes and member of a party in no sympathy with such slogans, explained to me that, "As a young person it was easy to recognize yourself in slogans like 'It is forbidden to forbid...' So as young people we recognized ourselves in these types of demands, in these cultural demands, and we joined in on the basis of these ideas."

The poll published by the *Nouveau Magazine Littéraire* revealed that 79% of the French believe that May '68 had positive consequences, while 83% viewed it as a "social" movement. The workers gained raises and increased union rights, but the liberation of the person flowed from the students' slogans. The lasting effects of raises and expanded union rights, in popular memory, were small; the changes in daily life far overwhelmed them. Ten million strikers seem to have weighed little in the balance, despite the subsequent efforts of leftists and left-wing historians to redress the imbalance.

And yet, it is possible to see that precisely that ultimate success of the individual was part and parcel of a central cause of the greater failure of May: the unbridgeable gap between the students and workers.

In fact, there is a common graffiti borrowed from the Situationists that encapsulates the incommensurability of the demands and worldviews of the two groups and explains why they were unable to truly work together. "Never work" was painted on many a wall around France. "Never work," a cry that could be made by students and the young who did not have families to feed, and which could mean nothing—except perhaps an insult—to someone working in the mines in the North or an auto factory on the outskirts of Paris. They did not have the leisure to not work.

The ongoing war between the young and the old that was being fought throughout the West, in France no less than elsewhere, had, prior to May, been fought also within the French Left. It is not a coincidence that a premonitory moment occurred in 1965, when the PCF expelled the oppositionists within its student group, the Union des étudiants communistes, as a way of quelling discord within the party. And it is certainly significant that the two groups to the left of the PCF who fought it most bitterly had the word "jeunesse"—youth—in their names: the Trotskyist Jeunesse communiste révolutionnaire and the Maoists of the Union de la jeunesse communiste marxiste-léniniste (UJCML). On May Day 1968, just two days before the outbreak of the revolt in the Latin Quarter on May 3, they brawled with the Communists at the annual march. Doctrinal disagreements were the ostensible reason for the battles and splits, but lurking behind, if not motivating them, was the impatience of young leftists with the seeming lack of fire of the Communists, an ambient feeling that youth meant hope, and nothing could be expected from the old. It was a playing out of the most (in)famous phrase of the American 60's, spoken by Jack Weinberg in Berkeley: "Never trust anyone over 30."

For the Communists, even at the highest points of the May events, the situation was not ripe for more than their more bread and butter demands; revolution was not the order of the day. For the young in May and subsequent years, the revolution was a week from Thursday. The Maoist Gauche Prolétarienne, heir to the UJCML, published a book in 1969 that summed up their attitude: *Vers la guerre civile*. Toward civil war. Between two such viewpoints, nothing in common was possible

Guy Texier, a Communist union leader at the naval shipyards in Saint-Nazaire, still expressed himself forcefully nearly fifty years later when I asked about students coming to his workplace: "Oh yes, we kicked them in the ass." For Texier, the presence of the young signified but one thing: "They came to undo what we'd built." The students, being young, for Texier and his comrades, did not understand what a strike meant: "...We kicked them in the ass. On principle, and also because the work of union militants is complicated, it's not something where you come and everything is immediately decided. There are discussions..." The young simply had neither the knowledge nor the experience to lend the workers anything. And their elders considered it the height of arrogance for the students, whom they considered to be their future bosses, to pretend to be able to teach the workers anything.

Louis Althusser, though he was absent from Paris due to illness during the events, in his correspondence with the Italian Communist Maria-Antonietta Macchiocchi, expresses the PCF's contempt for the young, speaking of the "revolutionary character of the working class, and *of it alone*," dismissing the students as "subjectively revolutionary (= petty-bourgeois revolutionary declarations," as opposed to the "objectively revolutionary" workers. He mocks the students as "living in a dream" that they and their barricades detonated the general strike. Althusser writes that, "in spite of the subjectively revolutionary intentions of the best of them," they are "contributing objectively to the bourgeoisie's reversal of the real order of things, i.e., to the passing over in silence of what, in the final analysis, played an absolutely determining role in May, that is, the general strike of nine million workers."

The students "offering their help" was the height of arrogance for Althusser: "Instead of simply going to the factory gates to 'offer their help' to the workers, the Sorbonne students should *at the same time* have asked the militant workers at these factories to come to the Sorbonne to teach them how to carry out an occupation effectively."

Lurking here we see the resentment felt by the "elders" for the arrogance of youth, for its insistence that it and it alone knew the way out of the current order, that it and it alone—and not the fogeyish PCF—could lead the workers along the road to the overthrow of capitalism. The student movement did not hide its disdain for the Communist leadership. The leader of the students' March 22 Movement, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, boasted at the end of one of the large worker-student marches about how good it felt to be at the head of it while the Communist "scoundrels" took up the rear. Prior to the outbreak of the events, Pierre Juquin, a member of the Central Committee and the PCF's delegate to intellectuals, had gone to the focal point of the uprising at the University of Nanterre to speak to the students and had been shouted down. He was treated no better than the Minister of Youth and Sport, François Missoffe. Missoffe, a supporter of De Gaulle since World War II and the holder of various offices under Gaullist governments before this one, had come to the university on behalf of the government to inaugurate its new swimming pool in January 1968. Cohn-Bendit confronted the minister, saying that the "White Book" on the problems of the young that his ministry had just published was "Six hundred pages of nonsense. You don't even mention the sexual problems of the young." Missoffe answered that, "If you have this kind of problem you should dive into the pool." Cohn-Bendit responded that, "This was the kind of answer you get from fascist regimes." He had been threatened with expulsion, though after negotiations with the minister, the threat would not be acted upon. But the tone was set. The battle lines had the students on one side, and the old—be they representatives of the working class or the government—on the other.

However arrogant the young, the older generation, equally certain of its correctness, gave as good as it got. It is one of the great ironies of the French events that coincidentally on May 3, the day the events began in the courtyard of the Sorbonne and the surrounding Latin Quarter, the PCF newspaper *L'Humanité* published a scathing editorial by the future party secretary Georges Marchais attacking the emerging student movement as "fake revolutionaries." In the piece Marchais singled out Cohn-Bendit as a "German anarchist," a characterization that would be twisted by the students so that Marchais would be made to have called Danny the Red a "German Jew." The student radicals are only ever called "revolutionaries"—with scare quotes—by the communist leader, and they are dismissed as "children of the grand bourgeoisie, contemptuous of students of working-class origin who quickly put their revolutionary flame on the back burner to go manage daddy's company and exploit the workers in the best traditions of capitalism." At best they are the auxiliary of the working class and more particularly of the Communist Party, nothing more.

Even so, the leaders of the working class, the Communists among them, were inspired by the students' struggle. The first Night of the Barricades on May 10—when the students fought the police, constructed barricades, and burned cars in the Latin Quarter—had as a direct outcome the strike declared the following Monday, May 13, that grew into a general strike. Students and workers marched together, but as Alain Krivine, founder and leader of the Trotskyist Jeunesse communiste révolutionnaire, told me: "I could feel there was no connection. We marched with the workers but there was no connection." This is May '68's epitaph.

The people I spoke to insisted that there were workers who attended the students' general assemblies, but always specified that it was "young workers," and there is historical evidence that this was the case. There are several explanations for this phenomenon; the most likely is that being young, they had not yet been fully integrated into the working-class world with its strong Communist presence. But it is every bit as obvious that young workers would have viewed themselves as young and part of the youth revolution that was occurring. The accent in their case was on the "young" part of their characterization. Whatever the case, they were nonetheless a small minority of the proletarian world of 1968, which Cornelius Castoriadis characterized as "the ponderous rearguard," characterized by "its passivity in regard to its leadership and the regime, its inertia, its indifference to everything that was not an economic demand."

This split between the young and old Left was not unique to France. The American Students for a Democratic Society, the leading radical group on the campuses until its implosion in 1969, began as the youth branch of the anti-communist social democratic League for Industrial Democracy, and disputes with its seniors ultimately led to an ugly divorce. In Italy, its "creeping May," which lasted several years, saw the young autonomisti and brigadisti, rising against the reformist PCI of their elders.

Herbert Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* theorized the decline of the workers as revolutionary actors, assigning that role to students and the black ghettoes, though it proved in the long run no more accurate a prediction than Marx's was for the working class. On a lower intellectual level, Abbie Hoffman wrote *Woodstock Nation*, a hymn to the youth movement. eIt should have been seen at the time and must be kept in mind now, that the famous Summer of Love of 1967

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Event report: 2018 Labor Notes Conference

Greg Lucero

I RECENTLY ATTENDED THE 2018 LABOR NOTES CONFERENCE, which is probably the largest rank-and-file union conference of organized labor in the United States. I went to find out what labor has been doing across the country and for my own interest in the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, to see what struggle had broken out amongst its members. Labor Notes has a special place in my heart, not just because it has stood as a bastion for radical organizers since the 80s, but also because it represents, as I see it, the last pillar of labor in the age of Trump. So the conference seemed like a good place to begin assessing how to rebuild American unionism—which appears all but dead—from the ground up.

But my Labor Notes story actually begins about a month before. Teamsters Local 705 had received ten spots for Labor Notes open to anyone interested in going. It's not surprising that the local leadership saw this as a good thing, seeing as they have frequently had rough spots with IBT leadership. The IBT 705 used to be run by the mob, and the mob lost control over 705. So it makes sense to have those who would virulently fight the international leadership for the best interests of 705 attend. There was heavy support for local candidates, which I mistakenly took as a quid pro quo. So I counted down the weeks to the conference with a sense of anticipation and dread.

Labor Notes represents one of the remaining institutions of workers' power. However, labor unions haven't done so well in the U.S., especially over the last quarter century, and it doesn't take a genius to note that the Trump administration has targeted them for destruction. Today, unions only account for 11.1% of the workforce. In the private sector only 6.6% of workers are unionized. The number changes dramatically to 35.7% for public sector employees. Many of these public employees are unionized in one of the 22 states that don't have right-to-work laws on the books. The current Supreme Court case Janus v. AFSCME will almost certainly favor business and Trump and make all public sector unions right to work. Trump picked the most recent Supreme Court justice, which means the court will likely side with his union-busting agenda. So how could anyone remain optimistic in this milieu? Well, that's precisely what Labor Notes aimed to do.

I started to head to the conference after coming from work. It's an interesting dichotomy. I'm dirty, sweaty, and tired. I stopped briefly at a grocery store for lunch meat and cheese, my go-to for poverty on-the-go meals. Feeling moderately satiated, I dozed on the Blue Line up to the hotel where the convention was being held. I arrived early to find the traveling Labor Notes staff quickly setting up the registration, merchandise, and book tables. I had little money and certainly not enough to blow on swag. I looked enviously at the various merchandise, but it remained decidedly out of my price range. I picked sleep as the next best option, pulled up a comfortable chair, set my alarm, and dozed again.

I woke up about an hour later and assessed the situation. The hotel had filled in slightly with various gangs of labor employees. The foyer was awash with the garish, bright union t-shirts, a few mixed button-ups, and an occasional suit. People registered and then proceeded to mill around aimlessly. I knew a few people from various parties, but I met up with some Facebook friends and a bunch of Teamsters I had met at the last Teamsters for a Democratic Union convention. We went to the overpriced restaurant and talked about the upcoming UPS contract.

I had planned my conference carefully. I didn't need to know what a labor union was or receive steward training since it wasn't my first day as a labor activist and I also hadn't been elected or appointed steward. I was here to learn about filing grievances, meet other Teamsters working on the UPS contract, and get drunk. The last one remained sadly unfulfilled, as I was a man on a mission. Each day's sessions ended with a special night of some variety before starting over again. Generally, I found myself starting fresh since the people I knew at the conference I didn't know very well; they had membership in a different union or just different political objectives. Basically, the workshops were about fighting for better contracts, directly Teamster-related, or about oppressed nationalities; the exception was when I walked into the wrong room, where organizing to defend Veterans Affairs from further privatization was being covered. However, it didn't distract from the overall atmosphere of the conference. Labor Notes kept its chin up, but the fact that everyone knew that unions were on their way out was palpable.

Starting here, I continued the process of taking class after class ostensibly designed to build the union and labor movement in general. The workshops were not particularly striking. I attended one on police violence in Chicago, which was interesting but had little to say besides, "You should get your union to support this." As I mentioned, I accidentally wandered into a rather middle-of-the-road event on veterans affairs and unionism, which discussed raising the militancy of the unions involved in these affairs even though they desperately searched for help outside their unions in the communities they serve. The workshop on strike bargaining proved the most informative: one part history of organizing and another part instructive lessons drawn from that organizing. I heard about everything from protesting dinner parties to stopping shipments to a hospital, but the moment of truth came at the end when a younger Teamster's face became momentarily thoughtful and he gazed off into the distance. The rapid-fire speech he gave during the lecture died, and he spoke slowly and deliberately: "If you do what I said to do, you have a possibility of winning. But they will hate you." A timid question from the audience asked

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